



# THE INFLUENCE OF PSYCHOPATHIC TRAITS ON HOMICIDAL BEHAVIOR

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## ABSTRACT

This research explores the interesting link between psychopathic traits and homicidal tendencies, seeking to understand the influence on homicidal behavior. It aims to identify personality traits, explore their causation, investigate the extent to which individuals with such traits are prone to homicidal tendencies, and examine methods of identification. Signs of psychopathy, including disregarding social norms and frequent dishonesty, can offer valuable insights into the behavior of those who showcase homicidal tendencies. This research dives into the intricate interplay between neurobiological factors, environmental influences, and individual choices in the manifestation of homicidal inclinations.

Through experiments, quantitative data provides important insights into how psychopathic traits influence decision-making, empathy, moral reasoning, emotional responses, and rationalization across different degrees of psychopathy. These findings reveal that while psychopathy encompasses traits such as a lack of empathy, manipulation, and moral ambiguity, not all individuals with these traits become homicidal offenders. This complex personality construct is influenced by genetics, environmental factors, upbringing, and individual choices.

In conclusion, this research contributes to our understanding of the relationship between psychopathic traits and homicidal behavior. While psychopathy is associated with an elevated risk of violence and criminality, it does not guarantee homicidal acts. The findings emphasize the complex nature of this phenomenon and underscore the importance of continued exploration in this field.

**KEYWORDS:** Psychopathic, Homicidal, Genetics, Neurobiological, Rationality, Empathy.

## INTRODUCTION

In today's world, intense psychopathy affects only 1% of people, but other studies on the topic suggest that close to 30% of individuals have some level of psychopathic traits. However, we have yet to come to a clear answer as to how that affects our behavior. The strong link between psychopathic personality traits and homicidal behavior has become an area of interest to several researchers in numerous fields, such as psychology, forensic science, and criminology. This research paper aims to provide a deeper understanding of how specific psychopathic traits interact with various influences to shape the trajectory towards homicidal tendencies.

To this day, we do not have a clear answer as to how psychopathic traits influence individuals. Do individuals with high levels of psychopathic traits display more violent behavior? Do psychopathic traits have any influence at all? By analyzing case studies, gathering data, and gaining interdisciplinary insights, this study will contribute to a clearer comprehension of the psychopathy-murder link, which will emphasize the need for targeted interventions and preventive strategies within the realms of criminal justice and mental health.

### What are psychopathic traits, and what influences them?

The relationship between neurobiological factors and the influence of psychopathic traits on individuals prone to homicidal behavior is multifaceted. Researchers have found important links between the structure of the brain and psychopathy. For example, there are fewer connections between the amygdala and the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, which makes people less empathetic. Damage to crucial brain regions such as the frontal lobe, hypothalamus, and limbic system is

associated with heightened aggression, impaired judgment, and impulse control issues. Antisocial personality disorder is prevalent among many killers, impacting the frontal lobe and reducing concern for others' emotions. The "Serial Killer Gene," MAOA, affecting neurotransmitter regulation, may contribute to impulse control problems and heightened anger. Male serial killers often exhibit elevated testosterone and lower serotonin levels, intensifying aggression and sadism. Various behavioral patterns among serial killers involve manipulation as a common tool. This highlights the intricate interplay between neurobiology and psychopathic traits in those predisposed to homicidal tendencies. These findings underscore the complex nature of psychopathy's neurobiological underpinnings and its potential role in homicidal behavior among certain individuals. Childhood trauma is another important factor when discussing homicidal tendencies. Common factors among serial killers include a traumatic past, insecure attachment, loss or abandonment of parental figures, antisocial tendencies, head injuries, and low arousal levels. Startling statistics reveal that a significant 74% of serial killers have endured psychological abuse during their formative years, while 42% have suffered physical abuse. These harrowing figures underscore the heightened risk that individuals with a history of childhood trauma and antisocial behavior may develop into serial killers. The impact of trauma on a developing brain can be profound, potentially altering its structure.

Furthermore, researchers have observed that serial killers who endured childhood abuse often exhibited sexually violent behavior towards their victims before committing murder, contrasting with those who did not experience such trauma. Nearly all serial killers confess to having violent fantasies as

children, which they initially acted out on smaller creatures before tragically progressing to humans. These disturbing insights underscore the complex interplay between early life experiences and the development of psychopathic traits that can ultimately culminate in heinous acts of violence.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Objective:** To examine how psychopathic traits influence decision-making in hypothetical scenarios without making direct predictions about future homicidal behavior.

**Number of Participants:** 110 high school students

**Hypothesis:** This experiment will focus on identifying characteristics that are associated with decision-making. High school students with higher levels of psychopathic traits will show their decision-making techniques and patterns in hypothetical scenarios that involve interpersonal conflicts, dilemmas, or events that require empathy and emotion to answer. It was hypothesized that students with higher psychopathic traits will show rational reasoning over emotional reasoning, along with reduced empathy and a head-over-heart type of approach to the scenarios.

**NOTE:** This experiment is not aimed at predicting future homicidal behavior in the individuals who have participated.

## METHODOLOGY

**Participant Selection:** First, the participants' parent's consent was obtained to ensure the participant's well-being. For this experiment, a diverse number of high school students were gathered as participants. Before the experiment, the participants have been informed about the reason for the experiment and their voluntary nature to participate in it.

**Psychopathy Assessment:** A questionnaire aimed to assess the psychopathic traits. It should be noted that the purpose of this experiment is to understand personality traits and not to predict future behavior.

**Scenario Development:** A series of hypothetical scenarios that involve moral and ethical decision-making were created. Some of these scenarios involve interpersonal conflicts, dilemmas, or situations where empathy and emotional responses play a role. This particular scenario was chosen because it tests the participant's emotions and intentions in a clear way.

**Experimental Groups:** Based on the assessment of the questionnaire, the participants were divided into two groups: those with higher psychopathy scores and those with lower psychopathy scores.

**Scenario Presentation:** Scenarios were then presented to each group, and the participants were asked to provide their responses and justifications. Open-ended questions were used to encourage detailed responses.

**Data Collection:** After the scenario survey, the participants' responses and justifications were recorded, focusing on themes related to empathy, moral reasoning, emotional detachment, and rationalization.

**Ethical Debriefing:** After the experiment, the participants were provided with information about psychopathy and its complexities and emphasized that the study's purpose was to explore decision-making patterns rather than predict future behavior.

### Scenario 1: The Stolen Wallet

You find a wallet on the ground. Inside, there is a significant amount of money and credit cards. You know the owner's identity. Describe what you would do and explain your reasoning.

Long answer text

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### Scenario 2: The Cruel Prank

A friend asks for your help in playing a cruel prank on a classmate. The prank could seriously hurt their feelings. How would you respond, and what factors would influence your decision?

Long answer text

### Scenario 3: The Lost Pet

You witness a pet owner leaving a café without their dog. The dog looks friendly and well-cared-for. Describe your actions and decision-making process in this situation.

Long answer text

### Scenario 4: The Academic Dishonesty

A close friend asks to copy your homework, knowing you worked hard on it. How would you respond and why? Consider the potential consequences for both of you.

Long answer text

### Scenario 5: The Lost Wallet

You find a wallet on the ground, but this time, there is no identification inside. The wallet contains a small amount of money and a phone number. What would you do and why?

Long answer text

### Scenario 6: The Online Bullying

You witness a classmate posting hurtful and mean comments about another student on social media. How would you respond, and what factors would influence your decision?

Long answer text

### Scenario 7: The Animal Shelter Volunteer

You have an opportunity to volunteer at an animal shelter, but it requires a commitment of several hours per week. Describe your decision-making process and what factors you would consider.

Long answer text

### Scenario 8: The Suspicious Neighbour

You notice a neighbour acting suspiciously, such as frequently coming home with items you suspect are stolen. How would you respond, and what would influence your actions?

Long answer text

Note: The above are the questions asked in the survey

## Ethical Considerations That Were Taken:

1. Confidentiality: ensured participant anonymity and confidentiality.
2. Informed Consent: Obtained informed consent from participants and their parents or guardians.
3. Debriefing: Provided participants with a thorough debriefing, explaining the purpose of the study and the broader implications.

4. Emotional Impact: Prepared to address any emotional reactions from participants and provide appropriate support if needed.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this experiment, the decision-making processes have revealed a striking divergence between individuals with high psychopathic traits and those with lower levels. Participants with higher psychopathic traits consistently demonstrated a predilection for rationalization and personal motives over moral and empathic reasoning, a trend consistent with existing data. This observation carries profound implications in the context of psychopathy and homicidal tendencies, suggesting that individuals with elevated psychopathic traits are more inclined to prioritize self-interest over the well-being of others, potentially placing them in situations conducive to violent behavior. These findings correlate with previous studies examining the connection between psychopathic traits and criminal conduct.

The first group, which had participants with lower levels of psychopathic traits, showcased moral reasoning in their responses and justifications. For example, in the fourth scenario, where a close friend wants to copy their homework despite the effort that was put into it, participants were happy to help by explaining the homework rather than cheating. Others outright said no to the request, explaining the potential consequences. It is also important to note that all participants in this group refused to allow their friend to copy, driven by their belief in the wrongness of cheating.

On the other hand, the second group, which had participants with higher psychopathic traits, showcased a different approach. Many participants in this group were fine with their friend copying but intended to alter their answers to avoid getting caught. Some said no, explaining their personal aversion to trouble, regardless of how close they are. Notably, a few participants in this group mentioned they would report the behavior. This group's responses reflected a need to prioritize themselves, even going so far as to let them copy down the wrong answers to avoid the consequences. This willingness towards self-preservation showed rationalization over moral reasoning. The first group, with lower psychopathic traits, based their decisions on ethical considerations and empathy for their friends. However, the second group, with higher psychopathic traits, showed a need to prioritize personal preservation, often at the expense of others' well-being. This distinct contrast in ethical deliberation and reasoning underscores the influence of psychopathic traits.

As one can observe from the data, the two sets of responses clearly diverged. The first group prioritizes empathy and humanity, while the second group leans more towards self-interest. Empathy was the basis for the first group's actions, while the second group showcased a lack of empathy, often driven by personal motives. The data gathered from this experiment suggests a correlation between psychopathic traits and decision-making tendencies. The experiment has shown how varying levels of psychopathic traits influence decision-making patterns. The differences between the groups, notably in empathy, moral reasoning, and self-preservation, highlight the impact of psychopathic traits on ethical considerations. The findings imply a significant effect of psychopathic traits on decision-making processes.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this research has explored the link between

psychopathic traits and homicidal tendencies. The findings highlight the nature of psychopathy, where not all individuals with these traits are destined to commit murder, yet certain predispositions exist. Factors such as genetics, environment, upbringing, and personal choices contribute to the building of this personality construct. At the beginning of the experiment, it was hypothesized that people with higher levels of psychopathic traits would show rational reasoning over emotional reasoning, along with reduced empathy and a head-over-heart type of approach to the scenarios. From all the data that has been collected from the experiment, it can be observed how it links to the hypothesis. Psychopathic traits have a significant influence on decision-making among people. In this experiment, people with low levels of psychopathic traits displayed kindness and humanity in their responses; they used moral reasoning and empathy as justifications for their actions.

On the other hand, people with higher levels of psychopathic traits tended to put their personal needs first and showcased a lack of empathy in their responses. Their justifications were rational and cunning. They were also quite different from the first groups. These different responses were anticipated and fell in line with the hypothesis. This experiment provides valuable insight into how psychopathic traits influence the decision-making process among individuals. These findings show that the more psychopathic traits one displays, the more likely they are to use rational reasoning in their decision-making.

The question of whether psychopathic traits influence homicidal behavior is at the core of this research. The data from the experiment, along with the existing body of knowledge on the topic, suggest a complex and intricate relationship. While psychopathic traits encompass characteristics like a lack of empathy, manipulative behavior, and moral ambiguity, they do not guarantee homicidal tendencies in all individuals who possess them. Instead, psychopathy appears to be a multifaceted construct shaped by a combination of genetics, environmental influences, upbringing, and individual choices.

This research provides empirical evidence that individuals with varying levels of psychopathic traits do exhibit distinct decision-making patterns, rationalization processes, and levels of empathy. These distinctions offer insights into the potential risk factors and contributing factors associated with homicidal tendencies. While not all individuals with psychopathic traits become killers, this research highlights the significance of understanding how these traits can impact behavior and decision-making in some cases. Therefore, the influence of psychopathic traits on homicidal behavior is undeniable, but it is just one piece of a complex puzzle that includes various other contributing factors.

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